

## **Village Center Revitalization**

### **River Hill Village Center Listening Session**

### **May 5, 2008 Session Notes**

These meeting notes provide an overview of the presentation and meeting discussion. Comments are organized by topic, rather than arranged in the order that they were made.

## **Introduction**

Bill Mackey and Tom Sprenkle of the Department of Planning and Zoning, Candace Dodson-Reed, the County's Community Liaison, and Jessica Feldmark, Senior Advisor to the County Executive, were present at River Hill's Village Board meeting on May 5, 2008. Bill Mackey opened the listening session with the Village Board and Village Manager, and an open discussion ensued.

## **Village Discussion**

### **What should be the Process for Village Center Revitalization?**

The Village Board asked about the scope of possible changes. The County responded that at this time the process is for possible village center revitalization only. A Board member expressed the need to protect the character of the village centers by creating a master plan that addresses character first, then developing a process. For example, find an anchor store to help define the character of the village center and then determine secondary land uses to support that anchor. The density or housing allowance should be tied to supporting the anchor. It's also important to maintain the integrity of the village as a gathering place. Big box stores could compromise that integrity.

Each village center could be themed as a destination. For example, Wilde Lake village center could be the "green" village center with green-themed retail and LEED platinum houses, while another village center could be the "arts center" with an arts cinema, studios, artisans' live/work space, etc., so that every village center would be a unique destination. This could help with competition against big boxes.

A Village Board member commented that the identity of the villages is important to consider and that collaboration is extremely important to maintain the identities while revitalizing. This member also mentioned that mixed use is being tried in many places today.

It was also noted that the different owners of the different village centers make it difficult to achieve a vision for all the village centers and to coordinate and manage redevelopment. Possibly, the Villages Boards could work together to create an overall village center master plan. Keeping the villages zoning task force involved in zoning issues could also be further investigated.

The process should address building heights and the integrity of existing buildings. The River Hill Village Center should always be pedestrian friendly and have good connections across MD 108. The center should have trees and pedestrian crossings. Traffic calming and grade-separated pedestrian crossings were raised as unlikely but possible answers to connecting the Village Center with adjacent retail areas.

The community's input on amenities and pedestrian infrastructure should be a more formalized process. The Board responded positively to the County's inquiry regarding a pre-submission community meeting with the developer to meet this objective. Additional public input would be highly desirable.

A new process is needed because when The Rouse Company proposed New Town zoning, it did not make allowances for when HRD might no longer own parts of Columbia. A lack of detail about what should happen and the community's role regarding public input are what the County is now trying to address. In response, it was mentioned by the village that the master planning process with the County guiding that process seemed to work well. It was suggested that the County act as the petitioner or the gatekeeper to avoid possible conflict between the original petitioner and village center property owners.

It was suggested that the County could be assigned the role of maintaining the original Rouse vision. It was also noted that the County's role is to enforce regulations. A regulatory approach is not necessarily the best way to preserve the Rouse vision. The Board opined that the County should define the goals of the process for redevelopment first, and then roles such as a "gatekeeper" could be addressed after that.

It was emphasized that property owners are the key. How can residents develop a vision without the input of property owners? This is their property. What would the role of property owners be in the process? Since it is the owners' responsibility to redevelop the centers, they must be involved in the process along with the community. It was also noted that a community vision has to be economically valuable to owners to be acted upon.

### **What Changes Might Improve the Village Center?**

It was also noted that there is a difference between the community creating a vision for activities in the village centers and an actual village center master plan. The Board agreed that the big issue in Clarksville is connecting the Village Center with the retail on the other side of MD 108 (located outside of Columbia) and thereby creating a more coherent retail corridor.

The Gateway School site was mentioned. Suggestions were made for possible re-use, including a park, dedication to CA, and other redevelopment options. It was mentioned that the County is investigating ways to include desired uses on the property as part of its disposition. The Office of Law is researching options and also the legal restrictions on the County regarding modifying the process.

### **What Land Uses Might be Appropriate in the Village Center?**

Regarding the possible inclusion of residential land use in the River Hill Village Centers, issues related to rented versus owned units were raised. This is something that only private sector developers/owners can control. A county cannot mandate rental or ownership as part of the zoning process.

The Board agreed that people appreciate the Village Centers not just as shops but as a gathering place. There were concerns expressed about crime in Wilde Lake, and the Board noted that if people cannot feel comfortable in a Village Center, then more "eyes on the street" may be needed in the form of some residential use. Also, the Village Board's involvement in tenant selection was mentioned as desirable.

